

Kit Homes in Herndon

By Barbara Glakas

Kit Homes – also known as mail order homes or catalog homes – were popular in the early 1900s. These homes were typically made of pre-cut pieces of lumber that were marked with ink stamped numbers and letters. An instruction booklet would come with the order, along with blueprints with letters and numbers on them, which would help the builders know exactly how to fit the lumber pieces together. Also included in the kit home order would be hardware and other supplies, such as doors, windows, nails, studs, shingles, bath tubs, sinks and facets, etc. The kit home company would set the buyer up with local suppliers for products such as plaster, brick, and cement. These homes came in many forms, from Colonials to bungalows.

Railroad communities, such as the town of Herndon, made it easy for local homeowners to purchase kit homes. The kit home building materials would be shipped to Herndon in box cars on the railroad. Once the materials arrived, the homeowner would arrange to have them transported to his/her lot. The homeowner would then hire a contractor to assemble the house. In some cases, the homeowner would build some or all of the house themselves.

Herndon has several kit homes and, not surprisingly, most are located not too far from Herndon's former train station on Lynn Street. Some of these kit homes are located on Elden, Spring, and Jefferson Streets.

Many people have heard of Sears kit homes, but there were many other manufactures that made kit homes, such as Montgomery-Ward, Aladdin, Harris, Lewis, and Gordon-Van Tine. Some of Herndon's kit homes were identified on Herndon's 1990 registration form to the National Register of Historical places. Some were also found through consultations with kit home experts at organizations such as SearsHouses.com.

Some of the kit homes that have been identified in Herndon are listed below:

- **908 Elden Street**– This is a Winthrop model from Aladdin Homes. It is a 1.5 story Craftsman style bungalow home, built c. 1920. It has triangular roof braces, nine-over-one sash windows, brown shingles and Doric porch supports. A 1916 catalogue ad says that this kit home cost \$996.55 that year. This home sits on what were originally lots 25, 26 and 27 of George R. Bready's Elwardstone Subdivision. Those lots were purchased in 1920 by Graham H. Bussey.

- **652 Jefferson St** – This is a Winona model from Sears, Roebuck and Company's Modern Homes. The lot on which the house sits is part of the Barker subdivision. This home is another Craftsman style bungalow. It was built c. 1930. It is 1.5 stories with gables, a wide overhang, and triangular decorative brackets. The exterior walls have decorative stick-style framing. A 1914-15 ad for this home showed that it cost \$721 that year.

- **650 Spring St** -- This is also a Winona model from Sears. It was built in 1927 by T. Edgar Reed. It is 1.5 stories, a three-bay asymmetrical bungalow. It has been modified and has additions. The home's first tax year in 1928 shows that the house was worth \$1,500.
- **644 Spring St** -- This is a Lewiston model from Sears. This English cottage home was built in c. 1933. It is 1.5 stories, a four bay asymmetrical home with a lunette in the gable, and some diamond paneled windows. Between the years 1927-1932, this home cost between \$1,527 to \$2,037.
- **647 Spring St** -- This is a Portland model from Lewis Manufacturing. This home is a two-story, two bay American foursquare house built in 1923 by David W. Bicksler. Property tax records show that a \$2,000 building was added to the lot that year. One of Bicksler's sons recalled how the parts of the kit home came into the Herndon Station and then were wagoned over to their lot on Spring Street. According to one kit home blogger, the Lewis Manufacturing Company was known to be one of the most active sellers of kit homes in the Washington, D.C, area from 1913 – 1925. A modern addition was later added to the rear of the house.
- **1010 Grant St** – This is a Little Tower House model from Gordon-Van Tine Homes. This home is in the VanVleck subdivision. The subdivision was platted in 1895 by Durbin Van Vleck. The home was built in c. 1920. A 1913 ad for this model #143 home showed that it cost \$716 that year.

Authenticating true kit homes is often difficult to do. But we suspect that there may be more unidentified kit homes in the town of Herndon.

About this column: "Remembering Herndon's History" is a regular Herndon Patch feature offering stories and anecdotes about Herndon's past. The articles are written by members of the Herndon Historical Society. Barbara Glakas is a member. A complete list of "Remembering Herndon's History" columns is available on the Historical Society website at www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org.

The Herndon Historical Society operates a small museum that focuses on local history. It is housed in the Herndon Depot in downtown Herndon on Lynn Street and is open every Sunday from noon until 3:00. Visit the Society's website at www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org, and the Historical Society's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/HerndonHistory> for more information.

Note: The Historical Society is seeking volunteers to help keep the museum open each Sunday. If you have an interest in local history and would like to help, contact HerndonHistoricalSociety@gmail.com.

